DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 449 301 CE 081 137

AUTHOR	Lyons, William; Fox, William F.
TITLE	Tennesseans' Attitudes toward Learning and the Workplace. Summary of Findings.
INSTITUTION	Tennessee Univ., Knoxville. Center for Business and Economic Research.
SPONS AGENCY	Tennessee State Dept. of Education, Nashville.
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	10p.; Prepared for Tennessee Tomorrow, Inc.
PUB TYPE	Numerical/Quantitative Data (110) -- Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Career Counseling; *Educational Attitudes; *Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; Instructional Effectiveness; Program Effectiveness; Public Schools; *School Attitudes; *School Business Relationship; School Community Relationship; State Surveys; Statewide Planning; Telephone Surveys; *Work Experience Programs
IDENTIFIERS	*Tennessee

ABSTRACT

A survey of Tennessee residents ascertained their attitudes about education issues. The survey was conducted by telephone using a computer-assisted telephone interviewing system with a random-digit-dialing-based sample. Useful responses were provided by 1,225 Tennesseans who were over age 18. Findings indicated the following: Tennesseans were not particularly positive about the present state of their public schools, although they tended to give somewhat higher ratings to nearby schools than to those across the state; there was a clear sense that high school graduates were not well prepared for work; a clear majority felt public high school graduates did not understand the process of competing for a job; and they gave the schools mildly better marks in preparing students for college than they did in preparing them for the workplace. Tennesseans were enthusiastic about business involvement in the educational process, especially in providing students with career information and workplace experience. They retained a bit more skepticism regarding business involvement in curricular and classroom matters. Respondents were quite enthusiastic about students spending time in the workplace, even at the expense of classroom time, and were quite supportive of providing much more career counseling to public school students. (Thirteen tables are provided.) (YLB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 449 301

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Tennesseans' Attitudes Toward Learning and the Workplace

Prepared for

Tennessee Tomorrow, Inc.

Prepared by

William Lyons, Professor
Political Science
and
William F. Fox, Research Professor and Director
Center for Business and Economic Research

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

G.L. Yowell

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CE081137

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

TENNESSEANS' ATTITUDES TOWARD LEARNING AND THE WORKPLACE

Method

The University of Tennessee's Center for Business and Economic Research and Social Science Research Institute, in conjunction with Tennessee Tomorrow, contracted with the Tennessee Department of Education to conduct a survey of Tennessee residents to ascertain their attitudes about a number of education issues. The survey was conducted by telephone between February 23 and March 5, 1998 using a Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing system, utilizing a random-digit dialing based sample. Up to four calls were made to each residence, at staggered times, to minimize nonrespondent bias. The number of Tennesseans over the age of 18 providing useful responses (1,225) resulted in a statewide sample yielding estimates within 3.5 percent at a 95 percent level of confidence. The sample was designed to provide estimates for the three grand divisions of the state within 5 percent at a 95 percent level of confidence.

Findings

Tennesseans are ambivalent about the quality of schools, with at least two-thirds saying the schools are fair or good. Rankings of schools are similar in each region of the state. There is a tendency for respondents to give better marks to schools closer to them than to those across the state (Table 1). Only one in twenty rate schools across the state as excellent. At least twice this percentage rate schools close to where they live as excellent. One can conclude that direct

TABLE 1

Overall, how would you rate the quality of Kindergarten-12th grade public schools in Tennessee? In your school district? How about the schools close to where you live?

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Not Sure
In Tennessee					
Statewide	**11%**	**40%**	**34%**	**4%**	**10%**
East	10%	38%	37%	5%	10%
Middle	12%	41%	34%	4%	10%
West	12%	41%	34%	5%	9%
Your school district					
Statewide	**10%**	**35%**	**36%**	**10%**	**9%**
East	9%	33%	37%	11%	9%
Middle	9%	39%	33%	9%	10%
West	12%	32%	38%	9%	9%
Schools close to where you live					
Statewide	**9%**	**29%**	**38%**	**12%**	**11%**
East	7%	29%	37%	15%	12%
Middle	9%	31%	39%	10%	11%
West	12%	28%	40%	10%	10%

experience with a school leads to a more favorable impression than does information gleaned from the media and other sources. Nonetheless, Tennesseans are not particularly impressed with the quality of their public schools, whether near or far from their homes.

Tennesseans do not believe that graduates of Tennessee pubic high schools are well prepared to enter the workplace. Only one in ten feel that graduates are well prepared, while one in four feel that graduates are poorly prepared (Table 2).

TABLE 2

Generally speaking, do you believe that graduates of Tennessee public high schools who wish to enter the workforce right away are poorly prepared or well prepared to fill a position with a company in Tennessee?

	Poorly Prepared	Somewhat Prepared	Well Prepared	Not Sure
Statewide	**26%**	**55%**	**11%**	**8%**
East	25%	55%	12%	8%
Middle	27%	53%	11%	8%
West	27%	56%	11%	6%

Tennesseans feel somewhat better about the job Tennessee public high schools are doing in preparing their graduates for college. One in five feel that graduates are well prepared to do college work (Table 3).

TABLE 3

Generally speaking, do you believe that graduates of Tennessee public high schools who wish to enter college are poorly prepared or well prepared to do college work?

	Poorly Prepared	Somewhat Prepared	Well Prepared	Not Sure
Statewide	**15%**	**58%**	**20%**	**7%**
East	15%	58%	22%	5%
Middle	13%	59%	19%	9%
West	17%	58%	19%	6%

Respondents were concerned about graduates' understanding of the modern workplace. A clear majority feel that public high school graduates do not understand the process of competing for a job (Table 4). West Tennesseans are somewhat more likely to believe students understand

the characteristics for success. Not surprisingly, nine in ten Tennessee adults feel that Tennessee public schools should offer greater career counseling (Table 5).

TABLE 4

Generally speaking, do you believe that Tennessee public high school students understand what it will take to successfully compete for a job when they finish their schooling?

	Yes	No	Not Sure
Statewide	**31%**	**58%**	**11%**
East	30%	61%	9%
Middle	29%	59%	12%
West	36%	53%	11%

TABLE 5

Do you think Tennessee schools should offer greater assistance in helping students decide what type of career they would have after their education is complete?

	Yes	No	Not Sure
Statewide	**88%**	**7%**	**4%**
East	88%	7%	5%
Middle	86%	9%	5%
West	91%	5%	4%

Each respondent was asked a series of questions about the appropriate role of the business community in the educational process. The respondents were generally quite positive about business being involved in education (Table 6). Overall, Tennesseans prefer a smaller role for business in curricular decisions and classroom instruction and a larger role in providing workplace experience to students, in providing teachers with workplace information, and in discussing careers with students. About one in eight Tennesseans would like business to play virtually no role in classroom instruction, but only two to three percent are opposed to business presence in career planning and providing workplace experience.

Tennessee adults strongly hold that high school students would benefit from part-time work experience that uses what they learn in school. Only one in ten feel that such experience would not make much difference (Table 7). A clear majority believe that better information about career opportunities would lead to fewer dropouts (Table 8).

TABLE 6

What do you think the role of the business community should be in each of the following. Should the business community play no role, a small role, or a large role in...

	No Role	Small Role	Large Role	Not Sure
Assisting in deciding what is taught in classes				
Statewide	**15%**	**42%**	**38%**	**5%**
East	14%	42%	39%	5%
Middle	15%	46%	33%	6%
West	15%	40%	41%	5%
Providing workplace experience for students				
Statewide	**3%**	**20%**	**74%**	**4%**
East	2%	19%	76%	3%
Middle	4%	22%	69%	5%
West	2%	19%	76%	3%
Showing teachers what goes on in the workplace				
Statewide	**4%**	**24%**	**67%**	**4%**
East	3%	22%	71%	3%
Middle	5%	28%	61%	7%
West	6%	23%	67%	3%
Teaching classes				
Statewide	**15%**	**41%**	**38%**	**6%**
East	13%	42%	40%	6%
Middle	19%	40%	34%	6%
West	14%	42%	39%	5%
Helping students understand a career in their area				
Statewide	**2%**	**14%**	**80%**	**3%**
East	2%	13%	82%	3%
Middle	2%	15%	79%	4%
West	2%	15%	79%	4%

TABLE 7

Do you think most high school students would benefit from participating part-time in work activities where they use what they are learning in school or would it not make much difference?

	Benefit from work	No Difference	Not Sure
Statewide	**87%**	**10%**	**3%**
East	86%	11%	3%
Middle	90%	9%	2%
West	85%	11%	4%

TABLE 8

Do you think fewer teenagers would drop out of school if the schools provided more career education or would it not make much difference?

	Fewer Dropouts	No Difference	Not Sure
Statewide	**63%**	**31%**	**6%**
East	62%	32%	6%
Middle	66%	30%	4%
West	61%	30%	9%

There is widespread support for raising education standards. Eight of ten Tennesseans wish to raise standards (Table 9).

TABLE 9

Do you think Tennessee schools should raise their educational standards or leave them as they are now?

	Raise Standards	Leave Alone	Not Sure
Statewide	**79%**	**14%**	**7%**
East	80%	13%	6%
Middle	78%	16%	6%
West	79%	14%	7%

A majority of respondents believe that additional time spent on applying learning through work experience would be of more value than spending that time in the classroom (Table 10). About twice as many believe some time would be better spent applying learning than spending it in the classroom.

TABLE 10

Do you think students would learn more if they applied what they learned through work experience or would they be better off spending that time in the classroom?

	Learn More Through Work	Better in Classroom	Not Sure
Statewide	**63%**	**31%**	**6%**
East	62%	32%	6%
Middle	66%	30%	4%
West	61%	30%	9%

Each respondent was asked whether a series of suggestions was a "good idea" or a "bad idea" (Table 11). Three in four agreed that beginning a discussion of career choices in the eighth grade was a good idea. Two-thirds believed that greater utilization of distance learning was likewise a good idea. About half agreed that it would be a good idea to base part of a school district's funding on student performance. However, fully nine in ten Tennesseans were in favor of competency tests for graduating seniors. And virtually all Tennesseans agreed that it was a good idea to provide students with an opportunity to spend time in the workplace of a company or organization where they might consider a career. Only 10 percent of Tennesseans report hearing anything about Education Edge—Tennessee's school-to-work initiative (Table 12).

Tennesseans have not heard much about Charter Schools. Only about one in four is familiar with the concept (Table 13). Of those who are familiar with Charter Schools, 45 percent favor Charter Schools while 33 percent oppose them (Table 13a). One in five of those who are familiar with the concept have not formed an opinion on Charter Schools. West Tennessee residents appear mildly more favorable to Charter Schools.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Tennesseans are not particularly positive about the present state of their public schools, although they tend to give somewhat higher ratings to nearby schools than to those across the state. There is a clear sense that today's high school graduates are not well prepared for work. They give the schools mildly better marks in preparing students for college than they do in preparing them for the workplace.

Tennesseans are enthusiastic about business involvement in the educational process, especially in providing students with career information and workplace experience. They retain a bit more skepticism regarding business involvement in curricular and classroom matters. Finally, respondents are quite enthusiastic about students spending time in the workplace, even at the expense of classroom time, and are quite supportive of providing much more career counseling to public school students. Tennesseans would like to see greater accountability, especially at the level of the individual student, but are less certain that school districts should be held accountable through their funding.

TABLE 11

Generally speaking, do you think each of the following is a good idea or a bad idea?

	Good Idea	Bad Idea	Not Sure
Beginning discussion of career choices in the 6th though 8th grades			
Statewide	**73%**	**24%**	**3%**
East	72%	25%	2%
Middle	72%	23%	5%
West	76%	22%	2%
Basing a part of school districts' funding on the skills of students to whom they grant diplomas			
Statewide	**52%**	**31%**	**17%**
East	52%	30%	18%
Middle	49%	31%	19%
West	54%	32%	14%
Requiring students to pass a competency test covering material in English, Math and Science in order to receive a high school diploma			
Statewide	**91%**	**6%**	**3%**
East	91%	6%	3%
Middle	91%	5%	3%
West	91%	6%	3%
Giving all students the opportunity to spend some time in the workplace of the type of business they might consider for a career			
Statewide	**96%**	**2%**	**2%**
East	95%	2%	2%
Middle	96%	2%	2%
West	97%	2%	1%

TABLE 12

Have you heard anything about Education Edge—Tennessee's school-to-work initiative?

	Yes	No	Not Sure
Statewide	**9%**	**90%**	**1%**
East	9%	89%	2%
Middle	10%	90%	0%
West	5%	92%	2%

TABLE 13

Some have suggested that Tennessee consider making some schools Charter Schools. Are you familiar with the concept of Charter Schools?

	Yes	No	Not Sure
Statewide	**27%**	**69%**	**4%**
East	26%	69%	5%
Middle	27%	70%	4%
West	29%	68%	3%

TABLE 13a

OF THOSE WHO ANSWERED "YES" - *Do you favor or oppose some Tennessee Public Schools becoming Charter Schools?*

	Favor	Oppose	Not Sure
Statewide	**45%**	**33%**	**22%**
East	43%	33%	24%
Middle	44%	33%	23%
West	49%	33%	18%